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BEFORE THE STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY
STATE OF NEVADA

In Re:
Nevada Connections Academy Notice of
Closure or Possible Board Reconstitution

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DECLARATION OF LISA MALABAGO

10 I, Lisa Malabago, hereby declare under penalty of perjury as follows:

11 1. I am a Nevada Connections Academy (“NCA”) employee. I make this
12 declaration in support of NCA relative to closure proceedings before the State Public Charter
13 School Authority held on May 25, 26, and 27, 2017, and continued to an unspecified date in
14 2017.

15 2. The matters set forth in this declaration are based on my own personal knowledge.
16 If called upon to testify, I am competent to testify to the matters set forth herein.

17 3. I am the manager of counseling services at NCA. I manage a team of 5 school
18 counselors, 6 academic success coaches, and 4 registrar/reporting support staff at the school. My
19 role requires me to keep track of our off-cohort, credit-deficient students and graduation
20 information. I would like to share with you what we do to help our students as individuals meet
21 their graduation goals.
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23 4. For the 2016-2017 school year, we have reallocated staff positions to better meet
24 the needs of our credit-deficient and off-cohort students. My counseling team analyzes
25 transcripts of new incoming students to ensure accurate placement. We offer credit recovery
26 with four intakes per year (one per quarter), allowing for students coming with failing grades on
27 their transcripts to recover credits while also moving forward on their regular courses.
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1 Counselors then follow up with each student to prepare an Individual Graduation Plan and/or
2 Graduation Recovery Plan for every student – including those who are credit deficient. This plan
3 helps students to set post-graduation goals and understand what steps remain at the HS level to
4 achieve those goals. We also determine an “Expected Graduation Timeframe” during these
5 contacts and plan for possible summer school scholarships. Because 49% of our 2016 cohort
6 came to us credit deficient, you can imagine the huge undertaking our graduation recovery plans
7 are for the counseling team. The beauty is that they have risen to the challenge and students are
8 making comments about never feeling like they had a counselor care that much about their high
9 school experience.
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11 5. In addition to the counselor transcript reviews and IGPs, my academic advisory
12 team has taken on the role of success coach at our school this year. Each member of the team is
13 assigned to approximately 100 credit-deficient, off-cohort students to provide positive behavior
14 supports and interventions. They speak to their students at least two times per month and set
15 short-term goals during each conversation. We celebrate small successes and big ones. We
16 encourage and provide positive feedback. We give out tough love when needed and hold our
17 students accountable for their actions and responsibilities. Ultimately, the goal is credit accrual
18 toward a graduation recovery plan. It takes time to build trust with these students because in
19 many ways the education system has failed them – and they often times are on the verge of
20 dropping out altogether by the time they enroll at NCA. They slip through the cracks or get
21 pushed to us from someone at their previous school who says they can’t help them – or that
22 they’d be better served by NCA. They have learned to distrust educators as a whole. However,
23 our success coaches refuse to give up and continue to engage, call and encourage the kids to stay
24 actively engaged in their education. To make sure that this happens, we have made
25 improvements to the method by which we reach out to students—calling them in the evenings,
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1 for example, in our attempt to do whatever necessary to accommodate our students' schedules.
2 As a result, these kids are starting to see results. We have seen students who previously passed 1-
3 2 classes in a semester average 4-6 classes passed in our Every Student Success Academy. The
4 best part is, these kids are learning to trust that NCA educators do care about what they do and
5 where they are going in life – but we need time to help them.
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7 6. I am extremely disturbed by State Public Charter School Authority Staff's
8 recitation of our graduation rate and statements to the effect of “only 4 out of 10 kids graduate
9 high school” at NCA. In essence, the Authority is sending the message that our graduates who
10 may not make it in 4 years don't count – and fail to acknowledge that these students came to
11 NCA credit-deficient and the school is performing well in serving these students, reengaging
12 them, and serving the rest of its population. To provide insight into the makeup of the students
13 who are not considered when the Authority Staff focuses solely on this single data point of the
14 four-year cohort graduation rate our 2016 cohort is comprised in part of the following:¹
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- 16 • 5 2016 students listed a non-graduates earned their diplomas with us one semester late
17 this year and are official Winter 2017 graduates.
- 18 • 2 of our 2016 students are presently enrolled and hoping to graduate in Summer 2017.
- 19 • 5 of our 2016 students are presently enrolled and hoping to graduate in December 2017.
- 20 • 3 of our 2016 students of presently enrolled and hoping to graduate in Spring 2018.
- 21 • Only 2 of our 2016 students are presently enrolled and are not likely to graduate.

22 Moreover, to give you an idea of where the 2016 cohort high school class started with us, 13
23 students in the 2016 cohort started with us this year – most because they were pushed out of their
24 local zone school because they did not graduate within the 4 year time frame. We all know that
25 this is illegal, because the state allows for students to remain enrolled until they reach the age of

26 ¹ In addition, we anticipate that many additional students from the 2016 cohort will graduate in
27 June 2017. However, I am unable to speculate as to that number at this time because official
28 grades have not yet been released and the number of graduates will not be finalized until close to
graduation day on June 15, 2017. In an effort to provide completely accurate date to the
Authority, I will refrain from offering any numbers regarding June 2017 graduates at this point.

1 21, but zone schools are pushing kids out the moment they turn 18 when they cannot possibly
2 graduate on time. 8 of our 2016 students arrived at NCA just last year. Most of them were so
3 severely credit-deficient that we could not make up for the previous years in former high schools
4 within just one year. 11 of our 2016 students came to us after 2 years in their local high schools.
5 Some of those arrived at our school credit-deficient and some just did not adjust well to online
6 schooling right away. Some were chronically truant in their zone schools and felt that online
7 school was a great place to hide out. They discovered that we hold them accountable for
8 attendance, logging in daily, and talk to them one on one repeatedly to see them through to
9 graduation. They find out we care about them and believe in them. Only 1 of our 2016 students
10 still enrolled at this time has been with us for several years. One student had to drop out due to
11 health concerns in 2015-16. He is graduating this year with above a weighted 3.0 GPA. Another
12 student has a brain tumor that caused her to miss a lot of school in her zoned school. With the
13 flexibility of online school, she will graduate.

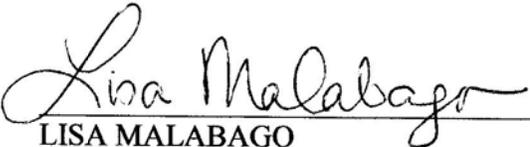
14 7. We cannot fail to count those who overcome great difficulties and earn their
15 diplomas. We must stop saying those kids who graduated “late” are non-graduates. We must
16 stop punishing schools like NCA for taking kids who have no hope of graduating on-cohort and
17 are being literally pushed out of their local schools. NCA has proven practices in place that work
18 to get kids graduated, but because some of those students are graduating after their 4-year cohort,
19 they are not counted as graduates – worse still, they are counted as drop-outs even though they
20 are still enrolled and working through their Individual Graduation Recovery Plan. Authority
21 Staff has refused to engage in meaningful dialogue about how NCA can continue to serve some
22 of our most at-risk students in Nevada and demonstrate the school’s true performance not
23 reflected in the single data point of the four-year cohort graduation rate. The reality is that NCA
24 students are finishing on the time frame that works for them as individuals (after they have
25 become credit-deficient in their former school before they enroll NCA) and they are earning high
26 school diplomas and entering colleges, trade schools, military, and the workforce after
27 graduation. We have to change the mindset of a government that would close schools for
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1 serving those students who take a little longer to graduate – and who have fallen behind not at
2 NCA, but at their prior school(s). The approach here the Authority Staff has taken turns
3 accountability on its head as we are not judged based on our performance with our students but
4 instead how they did at their prior schools if they fell behind there.
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6 8. This closure proceeding hold NCA accountable for credit deficiencies that
7 happened at the zoned, traditional public school. I just enrolled another student with NCA last
8 month who completed 3.5 years at the local school. He will not graduate in June. His new target
9 with us is January 2018. The school who failed him will face no repercussions for allowing him
10 to fall severely behind, and NCA will have him added as a “dropout”– not because he is
11 dropping out but because he was pushed toward NCA and we accepted him with open arms and
12 put together a plan to get him his high school diploma.
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14 9. Voting to close NCA sends a message to our 1600 high school students and our
15 1600 Elementary and middle school students that hard work and determination don’t matter, and
16 that education isn’t worthwhile unless you finish in the four-year cohort pattern – and that they
17 will be deprived of a school choice that often times may be their last effort to get a high school
18 diploma before they dropout altogether. On behalf of all of our late graduates, I say, “let us be
19 counted.”
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21 I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Nevada that the
22 foregoing is true and corrected and was executed this 11 day of June, 2017, in Las Vegas,
23 Nevada.
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26 LISA MALABAGO
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